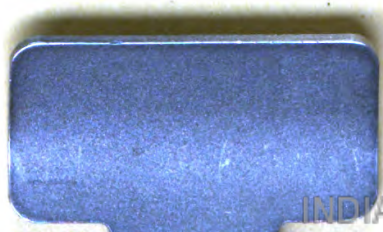
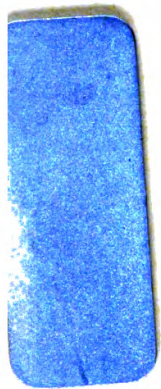


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FATHER MEANY
AND
THE FIGHTING 69th

*Father Stephen J. Meany—"heroic Chaplain for
the Fighting 69th!"*

Father Meany

And

The Fighting 69th

By
BURRIS JENKINS, JR.

Foreword by

REV. JOSEPH A. McCAFFREY
former Chaplain 69th Reg't

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TO ALL
THE CHAPLAINS
OF THE
ARMED SERVICES

NOV 3 1944

W W H

Living

With grateful acknowledgment to
Eddie Mahar, Assistant City Editor,
New York Journal-American.

FOREWORD

This is the story of a Catholic Chaplain—any Catholic Chaplain. This is the story of a Catholic Priest—any Catholic Priest, who with the love of God and his fellow-man in his heart, realizing that it is his duty to bring consolation to the dying, and spiritual strength to the wounded and suffering, goes into danger heedlessly in the performance of his duty.

It is fitting that such a story as Father Meany's should come out of the 165th Infantry—better known for years as the Fighting Irish 69th of New York. In the long and glorious history of that Regiment, dating back to the American Revolution, and carrying on actively in every war of the United States since, it has always been identified with God and Religion. *Pro Deo et Patria*—For God and Country—have always been words full of meaning to the men of the 69th.

And because faith in God has always meant so much to the 69th, the Chaplain of that Regiment has ever been one who has been looked up to, revered and respected. In peace time and in war time, never did the Regiment go to Camp or to battlefield without its Catholic Chaplain.

It was the Fathers Mooney, Brady, Lennon, Daly, Duffy, Egan and Rooney, who in years past built a background against which Father Meany so bravely and courageously stood on Makin Island. Another Catholic Chaplain doing his duty, heedless of all danger, performing his task thoughtless of his own life.

FOREWORD

It is with the hope that the brave exploits of the 69th may be better known, the work of the Chaplain in the Army may be more appreciated, and that the glory of God on earth may be increased—it is with that hope that Father Meany consents that this simple narrative of his experience on Makin Island be published.

Rev. JOSEPH A. McCAFFREY
former Chaplain 69th Reg't.

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I

THE NIGHT BEFORE

THE night before he was shot and left for dead, Father Meany blessed the flag . . .

On the blacked-out transport moving in on Makin Atoll, the flag lies folded over a table in Lt.-Col. Kelley's quarters, and about it the colonel and his staff stand grimly. It is a solemn moment.

Here is the flag of the 1st Battalion of the Old 69th Regiment, "New York's Own," the "Fighting Irish"—now officially listed as the 165th U. S. Infantry—going into action again for the first time since the Argonne . . .

The young priest's right arm moves in the sign of the Cross—a strong right arm that within a few hours is to stiffen with the cruelty of Jap bullets tearing through the flesh and tendons above his elbow, that will riddle his shoulder over the collarbone and plunge through the right breast-muscle to ricochet—actually—off a sacred medal on his chest . . .

Of course, Capt. Meany, regimental chaplain, doesn't know this is to happen. If he feels any concern at all it is over the complexity of his duties, which tonight are many, and the responsibility of being expected on rather short notice to fill the heroic mantle of such a legendary pred-

*The night before the Battle of Makin, Father Meany
blesses the flag.*

ecessor as Father Duffy—immortal chaplain of the Fighting Sixty-ninth from the River Ourcq through St. Mihiel.

“I am not Father Duffy and could never be,” he protests in embarrassment, “but only myself, who, as short a while ago as 1925, was plain Stephen J. Meany, one of a family of ten children living on Farragut Rd., Brooklyn, working his way through Fordham and running on the university track and cross-country teams . . .”

In truth, there was one night when Steve Meany ran (and lost) a two-mile race in the selfsame 69th Regiment Armory, but at the time it didn't enter his wildest dreams that some day he would represent, as chaplain, this hallowed band of warriors whose deeds of heroism began under Washington and continued through every war unto this day.

Nor was he anticipating then how well his athletic experience would prepare him for the training periods in Hawaii before the Makin battle when Father Meany would march up and down the column on the 25-mile, full-pack hikes to exchange a cheering word with the men and sleep on the ground beside them at night.

He wasn't even sure until the second half of his fourth year at Fordham that he would enter religious life at all, since no one of his family had done so in the recollection of his mother, who came from County Waterford, Ireland, nor his father, whose parents sailed from County Tipperary far back in the 19th century.

And on that Winter afternoon in the parlor of his

home when Steve Meany, without mentioning it to anyone, made up his mind, it was not the story of Father Duffy but of another fighting chaplain that inspired his decision—the life story of Father “Willie” Doyle who died “near Frezenberg, Belgium, while ministering to the wounded on August 16, 1917 . . .”

It was almost the next day that Steve applied for admission to the Society of Jesus and was later admitted to the Jesuit Novitiate at St. Andrew-on-Hudson.

Of course he'd heard of Father Duffy and worshiped his memory as had every other American boy. But without the slightest presumption of trying to follow such mighty footsteps—nor has he even now.

No one knows better than Father Meany himself that only the sudden return to the States of the “69th's” previous chaplain, the beloved Father Joe Egan of St. Bridget's Church on New York's lower East side, to accept a post under Bishop O'Hara with the Catholic Military Ordinariate, opened the way for his last-minute appointment to this distinguished post with “the old 69th.”

So it's the first Father Meany and not the second Father Duffy that proceeds this night below decks to the cabin of the chief quartermaster, where a long queue of men halfway down the port-side passageway is waiting to have their confessions heard before battle.

They kneel beside the desk where Father Meany sits. One by one they come and go until one comes who does not kneel.

Father Meany glances up.

"Are you a Catholic?" he inquires.

"No, sir," answers the boy. "I'm Jewish."

"Can I do something for you?"

"Yes, sir. I'm going into action tomorrow and—I wondered if you could give me a blessing."

"Well," says Father Meany, "I guess it won't do you any harm. Kneel down."

So the kid kneels and Father Meany performed a ceremony "asking God to send His abiding blessing upon him."

He tells the boy where Hebrew services are being held in the officers' lounge by a qualified Jewish soldier. The boy thanks him and goes to join those of his own creed.

At two a. m. Father Meany wakes.

At two-thirty he is saying mass in the men's mess hall before nearly 400 Catholics while Protestant services under Chaplain Giltner proceed at the same time in the officers' lounge. Many of the faces Father Meany sees this morning he will never see again—men whose confessions he's heard in the evening throughout the ten-day voyage or seen at the 4:15 mass each afternoon when the deck would be filled to overflowing with soldiers roosting on booms or hatches, or at recitation of the Rosary and Absolution, at 6 A.M.—so increasingly many as they approach the battle area that Father Meany runs out of communion wafers and has to ask the two ship's bakers—one Catholic and one Protestant—to make several thousand extra.

Most of the men he had "come to know pretty well"

since his arrival in the training area four months before where the boys began coming to his tent at night to discuss their problems and heartaches . . .

Conscious of all this as he gives the last blessing, Father Meany "fervently asks God to protect these men throughout the furious action to come."

If he included himself in the prayer he forgets to mention it . . .

After breakfast Captain Meany leaves his cabin—shared with Major Jim Mahoney and Captain Ed Strong, both from near New York—in full battle equipment. There is, besides the steel helmet, shoulder pack, dispatch case, two canteens, and extra medical supplies, a single cartridge clip on his belt containing vials of Holy Oils and the Ritual Prayer Book.

It's four A.M. when he steps on deck.

Though still dark the engines have slowed to a whisper. The objective is near. The island of Butaritari stands in forbidding silence off to port and all about the shadows of other ships glide forward together as if part of an invisible mechanism.

He isn't aware that at that very moment miles to the south a similar convoy is closing in on Tarawa—a convoy that Father Meany remembers seeing recede in the distance only a day or so before.

There is movement on the deck in the darkness but little noise except the muffled rattling of small arms against helmets or the shuffling of feet and occasional subdued curses quickly stifled at sight of the chaplain.

The Island lies in forbidding silence—the first shot thunders into the dawn.

"Shut up, you dope, it's Father Meany!"

There is no visible excitement, no fear.

Deserted but not forgotten on the bulletin boards between decks, flutters the final message from Lt. Col. Kelley to his men of the 1st Battalion, printed in the dog-eared last edition of the ship's newspaper—also edited by Father Meany—which reads:

"This moment is the final culmination of three years of field service and many months of intensive training. We are at last to carry on the act of combat begun in the Revolutionary War by the Sixty-ninth Regiment. We are now to add the sixtieth ring to the battle standard of the old Sixty-ninth. As we land on the beach I will be crying 'Faugh ah Ballagh'—which means in Gaelic 'Clear the Way!' "

At the moment the first shot thunders into the dawn, Father Meany is standing beside Harold Smith of the Chicago Tribune. Both look at their watches. It is daylight. The time is 6:16. The shot is an American gunboat shell and nothing but American shells fill the air from now until the landing.

A bombardment from Navy guns and planes pours onto the island as a small lighter is lowered overside containing the Battalion Aid Station equipment and personnel—and Father Meany. They are scheduled for the fifth wave.

For more than an hour the landing barge circles while the bombardment grows. It starts to rain. Huddled in the starboard stern the regimental chaplain's chief worry

is for his Mass kit which somehow must reach shore undamaged. Anticipating a watery landing—which won't matter personally now that rain and splashing waves have soaked them all—Father Meany arranges with the four tallest members of the boat—six-footers or better—to help carry the Mass kit since he himself is only five feet nine inches tall, his assistant, Corp. Tommy Ward, but five-six.

At last comes the signal to head for the beach and seas cascade over the bow as the lighter picks up speed and Father Meany notes the time. It is a few minutes after 8 A.M. . . .

There are but six hours full use of his strong right arm left for young Father Meany . . .

The signal to head for the beach

II

THE ATTACK

IN THE fifth attacking wave on Makin Atoll, Father Meany of the 165th Infantry (New York's "Fighting Sixty-ninth") heads for the beach . . .

He is as yet unwounded.

He steals glimpses of the landing, of the sea ahead dotted with barges, and behind the protecting semi-circle of transports and warships, of Butaritari Island itself with smoke rising from blasted warehouses and shore installations and now and then the huge explosion of an ammunition dump.

Carefully he watches the shore for the first sign of enemy fire. Fifty yards from the beach the coxswain's uneasiness increases as coral reefs rise wavering beneath the clear surface. Forty feet from shore the lighter scrapes bottom, hesitates, backs off, and continues over the reefs to the moment when the bow ramp drops and every man plunges into water shoulder-high expecting a rain of bullets . . .

Surrounded by the four tall soldiers carrying the Mass kit, Father Meany and his assistant, Corp. Ward, stumble through the surf and gain the beach.

One of the first men Father Meany meets is 1st Sgt.

"Buck" Rogers of Co. D, striding up the beach dripping wet with the folded flag of the old 69th tucked high under his shirt.

Not an enemy shot has been heard on "Red Beach." . . .

In a way Father Meany was afraid this would happen. It means that Father McCabe of the 2nd Battalion, his assistant regimental chaplain, will meet the brunt of the Jap resistance. On the ship, in studying the battle charts, it seemed to Father Meany that the 1st and 3rd Battalion landing on the top of the T-shaped island might have an easier time than the 2nd which was scheduled to circle the top and land halfway down the stem of the T.

"I hate to see this," Father Meany had said to Father McCabe. "I'm afraid the 2nd is going to catch it worse than we will. Perhaps we'd better change places."

But Father Anthony G. McCabe, O.P., of St. Vincent Ferrer Parish on Lexington Avenue, won't have it that way.

"We've been with our battalions so long it wouldn't do to change now," he had said.

So about 9 o'clock Father Meany leaves his equipment with Corp. Ward and starts roaming the beach searching for wounded men. There are none on this beachhead and only one on the spot a mile to the south. He walks south along the top of the T toward the spot where the 3rd Battalion has landed.

Father Meany finds a dead boy under a palm tree—shot through the head. He examines the dog-tag. If the tag shows a C for Catholic he will administer last rites.

The tag shows the Protestant P. Father Meany says a silent prayer and is covering the body with palm leaves when a doctor arrives to take the body to the prepared morgue.

Returning to the beach Aid Station, Father Meany hears that Dr. Krugman left some time ago for the forward lines now moving up on the tank traps that cut the stem of the T in two places near the middle. No word has come back from him. Anxious to find use for his services, Father Meany joins the medical staff under Dr. Bonanno to set out with his own equipment up the road.

The Mass kit becomes too heavy and Corp. Ward borrows a stretcher from the Aid men to facilitate transport. At a crossroad they learn that the 3rd Battalion has already seen action, running into a nest of seven or eight Japs, five of whom foolishly came from cover to be blasted to their ancestors by a single U. S. grenade.

One of the Jap prisoners is being questioned by Lt. Col. Joe Hart of Queens and Major Martin Foery, a graduate of St. John's University of Brooklyn, when Father Meany reaches the scene.

A U. S. soldier of Oriental descent does the interpreting. The Jap is stripped to athletic shorts and contrary to reports appears big and muscular—confirming later discovery that the island is manned by picked Japanese Imperial Marines.

Afterward Father Meany walks up the single coral-topped road with Lt. Col. Hart until the Colonel decides to return to his C. P. and Father Meany proceeds alone.

It all seems peaceful, too peaceful. The morning has now cleared to a deceptive serenity, the air balmy. The narrow road runs between two lakes feathered with tall coconut palms. Meeting no Jap opposition at all, Father Meany has long ago turned his coat lapels outward to reveal the shining insignia of the cross.

Beyond the lake there is a soldier standing at the side of the road.

"Hello, Father," he says. "I'm guarding a Jap booby trap. Want to see it?"

He leads the way ten yards off the road where a shiny Luger pistol lies on a fallen coconut palm. At first Father Meany doesn't notice the thick string leading from the trigger under the palm leaf. Then the soldier points it out.

"Pretty corny, huh, Father?" says the soldier.

A hundred yards beyond, Father Meany meets the first members of Co. C dispersed on the left side of the road. Farther to the left the lagoon gleams pale blue through the palms. The air is warmer and his dispatch case feels heavier.

Father Meany walks to the shore and sits down to watch the landing boats of the 2nd Battalion some 3,000 yards off shore, awaiting the signal to start for their appointed spot on the beach inside the lagoon—the beach that is soon to redden with the bitterest fighting of the occupation.

As the first lighters roar into life and start for the landing Father Meany calls to Capt. Neal Manley nearby to

*Father Meany proceeds alone toward the
beachhead.*

come watch the show. They can see the ends of three piers jut beyond a bulge in the island that cuts off their view of the buildings and installations. About 50 yards offshore lie two half-sunken steel ships now under fierce bombardment from a U. S. destroyer, which, it turns out later, fails to silence completely the hidden machine guns.

As bullets splat the leaves, he and the Captain jump for cover.

Through Capt. Manley's field glasses Father Meany observes shells chunk into the hulks and one stack topple on the deck, and the barges streak across the open space between the ships and piers and that's all he can see of the boats because now Jap machine guns include them in the line of fire. As bullets splatter the leaves and trees around them, he and the Captain hug the ground for cover.

Unable to perceive the landing itself they can only wait

now for a glimpse of at least one boat returning to the transport. During long moments none appears.

As the gunfire grows they can only guess the scene that actually unrolls off the beach where a young generation of the "Fighting 69th" under Lt. Col. John F. McDonough of Queens is wading bravely ashore through 300 yards of shoal water over coral reefs and a cross-fire of machine guns—many of them to die on the way.

At last they see two empty landing barges emerge from the shore. The beachhead is established . . .

Now Father Meany feels it is his duty to come to the immediate aid of Father McCabe if it is humanly possible. Leaving the shore he proceeds 50 yards onward where he meets Lt. Col. Gerard W. "Cap" Kelley, formerly of the City Engineers office, commanding the 1st Battalion, and his driver, Jack Stewart—also from New York—eating their K rations. Strangely, Chaplain Meany hasn't thought of food although it is 1:30 p.m.

Col. Conroy, commanding the regiment, joins them. When he mentions talking with Lt. Col. "Jimmy" Roosevelt it is the first time Father Meany has known that the President's son is with the invasion party.

"What's the situation?" Col. Conroy asks of Lt. Col. Kelley whose ear is now glued to a portable radio.

Kelley answers with some surprise, "The 2nd Battalion has landed without opposition."

"Without opposition!" an officer repeats. "They must be tough men! Then what were those machine guns shooting at?"

At this point Col. Conroy orders the advance.

The advance begins at 2:10 p.m. As they step cautiously through the coconut trees fringing the road, Lt. Col. Roosevelt joins the group, but there is no time for Father Meany "to obtain a formal introduction."

On first observation the President's son appears to Father Meany "gaunt and not too well." (It has been reported since that Jimmy Roosevelt subsisted on crackers and milk throughout the invasion, because of a stomach ailment.)

Without warning Lt. Dan Nunnery of Woodside, L. I., suddenly lifts his carbine to his shoulder and fires into a tree.

"Must be a sniper," mutters a soldier.

Father Meany can't see the body. There is no answering shot so far. A few yards further Lt. Nunnery again throws up his gun to pour bullets into a foxhole. Father Meany reaches the spot in time to verify the dead Jap with three bullet holes "very evident" in his head.

"Want to see your first dead Jap?" Father Meany calls to Col. Conroy.

Those are the last words he ever speaks to James Gardiner Conroy, former Brooklyn lawyer, up to that last moment the last commander of the "Fighting 69th."

Colonel Conroy now has but 12 minutes to live. Father Meany but two minutes before a Jap machine gun will drop him in his own blood . . .

*Col. Gardiner Conroy—gallant leader of the Fighting
69th—who died in action on Makin Atoll.*

III

THE MEDAL

THE Colonel stares down at the dead Jap, but he says nothing . . .

Shooting breaks out up ahead and every man takes cover. Behind a tree with a radio operator, Father Meany hears bullets chunk into the fibrous wood.

"I think they're aiming at me," the radioman remarks casually.

Feeling that his "time has not yet come," Father Meany "finds himself another tree!"

From the ground nearby, Lt. Col. Jimmy Roosevelt sees Father Meany move. "Better get down, bud," he calls.

Then, noting the chaplain's insignia, corrects the form of address with the words:

"Getting pretty hot, eh, padre?"

It is at this moment in the history of the "Fighting Irish" that Stephen J. Meany, new chaplain of the "old 69th," hears a soldier cry out "there's a man lying in the road over here!" and Capt. Meany becomes instantly Father Meany, the priest—sworn to minister to the wounded and dying, unmindful of the warning of death in flying bullets.

"Want to see your first dead Jap?" Those are the last words he ever speaks to Colonel Conroy.

So it's Father Meany, the priest, who jumps to his feet and dashes across the road to where the soldier lies in a gully with blood covering his right arm and the torn shirt sleeve and spreading on the ground around him. Father Meany doesn't speak nor does the soldier.

He raises the wounded man's right arm and with a sheath knife is cutting away the shredded sleeve when something burns into his own right arm and shoulder.

He feels the sickening cruelty of Jap bullets.

But he doesn't feel that as much as the blow on his chest which he clutches with his left hand to feel a gaping cavity and a warm flow of blood.

Now young Father Meany is lying alone on his back where he has rolled away from the road behind a bush. The other wounded man has crawled back for help, leaving Father Meany with his helmet under his head so that he can see the jagged hole in his shirt on the right side swelling crimson and larger, and that's when he notices the medal.

*The Sacred Medal—bent by the impact of a bullet—lies beside the jagged hole in Father
Meany's chest.*

The Cruciform medal is in the shape of a cross and includes the Miraculous Medal, the Sacred Heart Medal, the St. Joseph Medal and the St. Christopher Medal—and it is bent from the impact of a bullet.

It is resting beside the wound, detached from the chain which held it around his neck and which has disappeared.

There were two identification tags enclosed in cloth. Now there is only one—with the cloth torn away. Father Meany is sure the other tag has been driven into his chest.

Preparing himself for death with the bent medal in his hand, Father Meany prays.

Afterward he feels of his forehead and imagines it is getting cold. If he thinks of his mother back in Brooklyn, and six sisters and three brothers, it is without the agonizing regrets of a man with the responsibilities of a family. They are well taken care of. Two of his sisters have followed him into religious life as nuns, a brother into the priesthood. Three others are married.

Father Meany's responsibilities are to the men of the regiment—and the chaplains under him like Father McCabe. If only he'd been able to reach Father McCabe!

From the rattle and thunder of guns just a mile ahead beyond the tank trap, the stricken chaplain can only guess how urgently Father McCabe needs him. And here he lies, unable to move—he believes, dying.

What he doesn't guess is that of all the Americans killed and wounded on Butaritari Island in the Makin invasion, most of them are to fall in that area ahead, and that Father McCabe himself—without food or sleep—is

Father Anthony McCabe—who, Father Meany says, was the “real working Chaplain” of the Fighting 69th.

to bury 30 of them in the next four days and four nights of the furious engagement.

So to Father McCabe (as Father Meany is the first and loudest to proclaim) falls the honor of becoming the "actual working chaplain of the Fighting 69th in the battle of Makin."

And it is from Father McCabe the stories come of men



Men tired from combat pitching in to help bury the dead.

tired from combat approaching him in lulls in the fighting to say, "Father, do you need any help?" and pitching in to dig graves and help carry the dead.

There is the time Father McCabe dives into a shell hole to escape shrapnel to find the Protestant chaplain, 1st Lt. Frank Reynolds, beside him and asks:

"How are you feeling Frank?"

And Chaplain Reynolds replies by jumping from the

shell hole to continue sharing equally in the burials and ministrations to the wounded all through the hundred-hour nightmare.

Once during the first day, two soldiers approach Father McCabe. One of them asks, "Father, how do I stand?"

"What do you mean, son?"

"I mean—my pal and I are going out to do a job on the Japs. We're wondering if we're ready to die!"

"Well, you were at mass and communion this morning. Yes, son, I think you both stand all right with God."

"Then give us your blessing, Father."

He does and they turn away on their voluntary mission which is to blow up a Jap pillbox with dynamite on the end of a stick. Father McCabe sees them crawl to the pillbox, shove the dynamite through a rifle slit—and then something must have gone wrong.

Pillbox and all disappear in the explosion. There isn't much left of the boys to bury—except two more names for the immortal record of the Sixty-ninth.

There is the boy who comes to Father McCabe on the second morning of the attack asking, "Father, can you teach me to pray?"

"Don't you know any prayers?"

"No, I never learned any and I sure wanted to pray last night."

"What happened last night?"

"I was in a foxhole that wasn't deep enough. With bullets whizzing around I thought I needed a little help."

"Did you try to pray?"



"Father, how do we stand—I mean I am wondering if we are ready to die?"

"Yes, sir, I tried. I said, 'God, if you only let me live until tomorrow I'll guarantee that this damned foxhole is deeper by morning!'"

Again there is the soldier who speaks to Father McCabe, hungry and thirsty now from the heat of a heart-breaking day of burial.

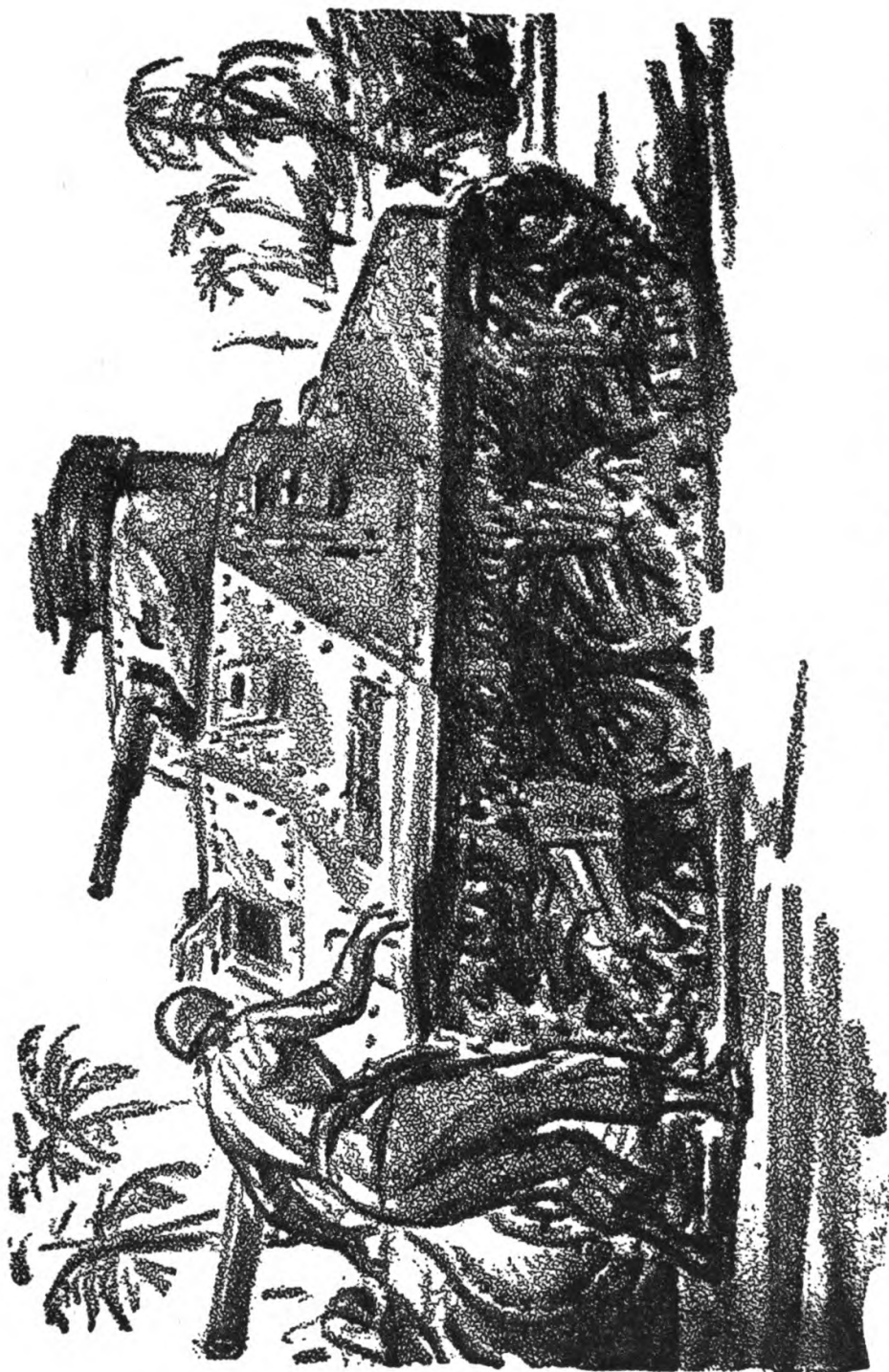
"Father," he says, "how would you like a nice bottle of beer?"

"This is a fine time to be kidding!" answers the chaplain with some irritation, until he glances up to see the soldier draw a full quart of Jap beer from under his shirt—only one of many along with bottles of sake uncovered in a warehouse.

What pleases Father McCabe even more is the supply of soft white blankets captured at the same time to make perfect shrouds for the dead.

But to Father Meany still lying beside the road, the whole battle has focussed now on the one Jap machine gun concealed behind another bush at a bend in the road less than 25 yards away. For it's this gun that prevents his chance of rescue, that forces men and officers to withdraw until the Jap nest can be put out of action or darkness falls.

The whine of ricocheting bullets next draws his attention. Four U. S. tanks have lumbered past to stop a few feet ahead and draw the fire of sniper bullets which ping against the metal around the peepholes and sing off in the direction of Father Meany. He throws his left arm over his face because his right he believes to be paralyzed



He doesn't see the gallant Col. Conroy fall—instantly killed by a sniper's bullet between his eyes.

from the wound in his chest. (He isn't aware then of his other wounds.)

So Father Meany doesn't see Col. Conroy run to the tank from the other side of the road to direct its fire against the machine gun nest. Nor does he see the gallant Commanding Officer of the "Fighting Irish"—the first one ever to die in battle—fall instantly killed from a sniper's bullet between his eyes . . . While surely at this moment the ghostly hands of that immortal host—of Major McKenna, of Capt. Mike Walsh, of Capt. Baker, of Joyce Kilmer and all the rest of the 906 men and officers of the old 69th killed or mortally wounded in the last war—swing up together in a proud salute.

Nor does Father Meany know that his friend, Lt. Dan Nunnery, also is lying fatally wounded a few feet from Lt. Col. Jerry Kelley—who didn't know it either until he turned to see the young man dying—to be buried later beside his beloved Colonel.

All that the wounded chaplain can see is the four tanks lumber up the road to the tank trap 200 yards ahead and return without firing a shot.

Still he isn't feeling so bad now for some reason. He decides that perhaps he isn't going to die—at least not immediately. Yet when he tries to pull himself around to get a clearer view of the road, each leg "feels like a load of lead."

Once a soldier raises his head across the way and Father Meany shouts "Get your head down—the Japs are over here!" No living soul appears again for what

seems to him a lifetime—but what is actually only 50 minutes.

That is when a faint sound reaches his ears from the road on his left and a little past the bush behind which he is lying.

IV

THE BOY

THE faint sound on the road a few feet from him arouses Father Meany . . .

His pain-dulled eyes make out the figure of an American soldier crawling, crouched, along this side of the road toward the Jap machine gun. Father Meany calls softly:

“Hey, soldier!”

The figure freezes, soundlessly turns his head, his Garand at the ready.

“Hey, soldier!” Father Meany repeats, “come here. I need help.”

Still the man hesitates, fearing a Jap trick. Then the chaplain adds:

“It’s Father Meany . . .”

The boy turns and pushes his way through the bush. Without a word he kneels beside the fallen priest, his back to the Japs.

“Will you—get my—medical kit?” Father Meany asks. “It’s in the back—of my belt. I can’t reach it.”

Shocked by the sight of the bleeding chaplain, the soldier silently secures the box of medicines. Deftly he administers sulpha tablets and half a canteen of water.

Still without a word he cuts away the undershirt from

the chest wound as Father Meany sprinkles sulpha powder into the cavity and lays the bandage across his chest with the box of gauze on top to hold it in place. He pulls his shirt over everything and buttons it.

The boy is still kneeling as Father Meany injects morphine from a syrette into his own left forearm with—he doesn't know how—his wounded right arm!

Maybe 15 or 20 minutes goes by before Father Meany takes the bent medal from the pocket on his left leg. Fearing that Medical Corps men cutting away his clothing, might lose it, he asks the soldier to "save this for me."

Father Meany has just placed the medal in the boy's hand when something thuds into the soldier's back. He ducks, bent almost double, the medal falling from his hand, and he begins to cry softly, like a child . . .

"Oh, don't cry!" Father Meany soothes as "a mother would speak to a child" and then, without prompting from the priest, Pvt. Berthiaume begins his confession—in French. Father Meany understands enough of the language to recognize the prayer taught to many Catholics of French extraction.

Before the soldier can finish, another bullet plunges into his back, this time, Father Meany has the impression, nearer to the heart.

In a reflex motion the boy straightens his body to receive the third bullet directly through helmet and head. The chaplain sees the bullet or fragments fly from the large hole above the eyes as the boy falls beside him.



Father Meany has just placed the Medal in the boy's hand.

Instinctively, Father Meany immediately gives him Absolution, reaching for the Sacred Oils to anoint the dying soldier on his right. It's all the priest can do in administering the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. He doesn't have the Blessed Sacrament with him.

But he isn't worrying about the state of this boy's soul. He remembers seeing him receive the Holy Eucharist on the transport 13 hours ago—even if the boy hadn't just laid down his life for a friend. . .

A few minutes later the boy hasn't moved. Father Meany feels his hand grow cold. He is dead.

Convinced now that the savage enemy is closer to him than any possible rescue, Father Meany removes the cotton in which the oils are soaked, from the empty gold watch case in which they were now carried on a ribbon around his neck, and throws them on the ground deep under the bushes to escape Jap hands if he is captured.

Then the young priest—who only three years before left a cloistered office in New York as business manager of the weekly Jesuit magazine, "America," to join the Army where he could "live the life of a priest and administer the Sacraments"—lies back to wait . . .

Vividly he recalls as he lies there the letter that reached him just four months ago in his Hawaiian Island outpost with another outfit.—". . . Father Egan resigning to accept important post under Bishop O'Hara . . . will you take over the duties of regimental chaplain of the 165th Infantry?"—Signed Lt.-Col. Lafayette Yarwood, Divi-

sional Chaplain, and of the feeling of excited pride with which he wrote an answer—"Of course."

"It was all too short a time to acquaint himself with the regiment scattered so widely throughout the training period but he did his best . . . a Mass each day . . . three Masses on Sundays, Confessions in the evening. . . ."

Father Meany must have dozed because when he opens his eyes it is almost dark and there is someone crawling up behind him.

"How you doing, Father?" says a familiar voice.

"Is that you, Lindy?" he asks.

"Yes, Father."

"Boy!" breathes Chaplain Meany, "am I glad to see you!"

Lt. Warren Lindquist of Boonton, N. J., is not a Catholic but a close friend of Father Meany's.

Four soldiers Lt. Lindquist has brought with him start to lift the chaplain up but Father Meany warns:

"No—don't stand up yet. The Japs are too close."

Taking him under the shoulders they drag the chaplain back 30 or 40 feet, where they judge he is safe from snipers. They raise him to his feet on the edge of the road and he tries to walk, a man on each side.

"My elbow, son!" he winces as the man grasps his right arm—still unaware there's a bullet hole through it.

He walks only a few feet before a wave of nausea overcomes him and he coughs blood. This confirms his suspicion that a bullet has penetrated the lung cavity. The men form an arm-cradle and carry him . . .



*He tries to walk—still unaware there is a bullet hole
through his arm.*

"I hope they recognize us as Americans!" remarks Lt. Lindquist drily, for now night has fallen and orders are strict to shoot anything that moves after dark. But they reach the Aid Station safely. It consists of two doctors, and 14 Aid men, and one jeep.

For Father Meany the next hour is "anything but a picnic." Both doctors go to work on him. Under a blanket, by flashlight, they cut away clothing and swab wounds. Injections of anaesthetic fail to stifle the pain completely when the digging is deep. (Father Meany admits he may have told the good doctors a few things under his breath that he is glad they didn't hear.)

With the first injection of blood plasma Dr. Krugman exclaims:

"What a marvelous thing this plasma is! A minute ago you looked like a goner. Now you're a different man—beginning to take notice."

Father Meany is taking notice all right. He is bawling out the clodhoppers who stumble over his feet, which stick out beyond the blanket in the dark. This happens so often that finally a man is stationed outside to sit on his legs for protection.

At last his wounds are dressed and for the first time he learns that two or possibly three machine gun bullets have struck him down.

"I counted six holes in your shirt, Father!" Cpl. Ward tells him.

They put the chaplain to "bed" by moving the stretcher he's been on all the time to the other side of the jeep



He awakes to hear Dr. Bonanno whisper, "Two Japs just came into camp!"

between Dr. Bonanno of North Bergen, N. J., and Lt. Lindquist.

The last shot of morphine puts Father Meany asleep until he wakes to hear Dr. Bonanno whispering, "Two Japs just came into camp!"

Father Meany replies groggily, "Well, surround 'em and hit 'em on the head!"

Then there is a scurry in the dark and shots and Dr. Bonanno comes back to report:

"One of 'em dropped his gun and ran so the boys had to shoot him. They hit the other one on the head with a gun butt and he's now tied up safe for the night."

Some time later he wakes to see the sky growing light above the coconut palms. In a semi-delirious state he begins to worry about a Jap dawn attack with bayonets, like those on Attu. Everyone seems to be sleeping.

"Wake up!" he whispers to the other officers. "Get those men spread out behind trees! It's time for an alert!"

The other officers are nice about it. They don't accuse him of thinking he's General MacArthur. They don't even say "Chaplain, stick to your prayers." Quietly they inform him that it's only two a.m. and that the moon is rising.

When dawn really comes they give Father Meany another transfusion and prepare to evacuate him to the rear. They hoist his litter onto the racks built into the jeep and with Lt. Lindquist, Cpl. Ward, the driver, and the Jap prisoner, speed back through a hail of bullets from the trees on the left down the same road that Father



Father Meany is rushed to an operating table aboard ship.

Meany had travelled so peacefully on foot less than 20 hours before.

With his face to the sky Father Meany can't tell what is happening when the jeep skids to sickening stops to roar off again at full speed as bullets whine overhead.

"For goodness sakes!" he cries more than once, "tell me what's going on!"

But there is no time for words now. The real battle for Makin has begun . . .



They sped through a hail of bullets.

V

THE LAST MILE

IT'S the last long mile for Father Meany in the battle of Makin Atoll . . .

For most of the "Fighting 69th" it's just the beginning . . .

As the jeep slows down from that wild, mile-long ride through a rain of Jap bullets, Father Meany's haggard eyes smile back at the grim faces of men in two long lines on either side of the jeep. They are the men of the 3rd Battalion—the old "Shamrock Battalion" of Argonne immortality—moving up under Lt. Col. Joe Hart of Queens—with whom so few hours ago Father Meany walked this same road in quiet sunlight before the shooting began—to relieve the hard-pressed 2nd Battalion now fighting for its life around Butaritari village.

Already up there brave men have died on "Yellow Beach" and in the water. Staff Sgt. Tom Sheridan of Bergen St., Brooklyn, has fallen with a bullet in wrist and hip after killing two Japs, to be dragged to safety 12 hours later by 1st Sgt. Chas. McKenna of Brooklyn.

Sgt. Trupo of Newark has gone down from a bullet in his foot while pumping grenades at the enemy.

And Pfc. John Furchner of 61st St., Brooklyn, with the

105th Infantry—for there are others besides the 165th Infantry that deserve rich credit for “takin’ Makin,” like engineers and artillery and even men from other regiments who laid down their lives in this battle—Johnny Furchner too, at 4 a.m. this very morning threw his last hand grenade from a foxhole as a sniper riddled his hand.

Already Staff Sgt. Kevin Wright has brought everlasting fame to himself, his folks, and the neighbors of Marion Ave., The Bronx, by advancing on two heavily fortified Jap emplacements in the volunteer company of Pvts. Pope and Prignano, to earn the Silver Star by attacking—“with complete disregard of his personal safety”—units of enemy troops, with hand grenades and later rifle fire and bayonets.

In letters home, 6-foot 2½-inch Sgt. Wright, born in Ireland but an American, shows natural pride in his decoration—“Fred can buy me a drink for this” . . . (Patrolman Fred Lowinger, a Manhattan policeman and Kevin’s brother-in-law)—and “it is something to brag about so you can tell the neighbors” and “when I get home the Wright clan is really going to have a blow-out—we’ll really break the lease!”

About the exploit itself Kevin writes simply, “There were some Japs in an air-raid shelter and a couple of the boys and I went down and got ’em.” To his brother, Albert, a druggist on Northern Blvd., and his sister, Mrs. Frances McNulty, also of Flushing, Kevin cables after the battle, “Safe, well, and tell MOM.” In a later letter he comments “I got away with a nasty scratch from a can



*While S/Sgt. Kevin Wright of the Bronx is taking two
Jap emplacements with grenade and bayonet.*

of rations." To his mother he writes of the action: "In landing I ruined that pocket watch you sent me. It got rusted up inside and in trying to clean it myself completed the job the salt water had begun. Will you send me my wrist watch—if someone isn't wearing it? With all the prayers riding on my head, nothing can happen to me . . ."

These are just a few of those in the thick of it on Yellow Beach . . .

To Father Meany, being rushed desperately to a ship's hospital, the faces of the advancing men of the 3rd Battalion stare at him with a strangely shocked expression. It is only then he learns of the report that spread a flame of fury through the regiment—"they not only killed our Colonel but the Chaplain, too!"

Old friends stop to speak chokingly, scarcely able to mutter more than "How do you feel, Father?"—even Col. Kelley himself, who has taken over command of the regiment from the moment Col. Conroy fell.

"Do you feel strong enough," Col. Kelley whispers, leaning close, "to say a word to Jimmy Rich, Father?" He indicates a disconsolate corporal from Yorkville standing beside a jeep. It is the man who has always driven Col. Conroy's cars. Father Meany calls him over.

"What's the matter, Jimmy? Miss the Colonel?"

"Father," answers the boy with a face of stone, "I lost the best friend I ever had . . ."

The chaplain tries to console him but he "can see the sadness remains."

Now Father Meany is at the Aid Station on the beach and Dr. Bluestone is redressing his wounds and Father Byrne—attached to Father McCaffrey's church on W. 42nd St.—is hearing the wounded chaplain's confession—the first chance Father Meany himself has had to see a priest in two weeks.

They promise to look out for his effects. Unshaven men and officers crowd around to say good-bye. Then Father Meany is on a barge with other wounded being lifted aboard a transport and rushed to an operating table. Lt. Com. Dineen of Buffalo cuts away the burned flesh and Father Meany doesn't remember much for the next three days as more blood transfusions keep him alive in the ship's sick-bay . . .

He doesn't hear the cough and whine of mortars any more, the steady ripping of machine guns and rifles under the tearing blasts of grenades and 75's as the Japs' main force is slowly crushed between the oncoming "Sham-rocks" and a detachment of infantry and machine guns cutting off Jap retreat on Kuma Island, nor the screaming laughter on that last black night when Jap officers—and men, too,—crazy-drunk on sake rush out in full-medalled dress uniforms to wallow in a suicidal slaughter.

There is Pfc. George Antolak in a foxhole that night grasping the flailing saber of a mad Jap officer with both his bleeding hands to turn the sword at last into the lunatic's vitals. There is the thin wailing cry of a baby in the darkness near the C. P. of Lt. Col. "Gallop Joe" Hart, indicating the amazing presence of native



*There is Pfc. Antolak grasping the flailing saber of a mad
Jap officer with both bleeding hands.*

women and children between the battle lines seeking to get through to their village. There is another group of natives employed a few minutes later as decoys by Jap infiltrators to be killed or scattered by machine guns.

Somewhere in an isolated foxhole Sgt. Chester Dey, of Missouri, is being paralyzed in the grip of a maniacal enemy to break away badly wounded at the last moment to reach the safety of his comrades. And on Kuma Island, Maj. Edward Bradt, of Schenectady, hears the voice of a woman cry out from the reef in the surf—the voice of a heroic native girl revealing—just before she dies—a unit of Japs skulking behind her in an attempt to escape the trap. U. S. guns wipe them all out.

Into the Command Post of Col. Hart 60 Japs charge with shrieks of Banzai before the “Shamrocks” mow them down.

In daylight Capt. Wayne Sikes of the tank battalion is running from tank to tank under steady sniper fire to direct their actions, and Staff Sgt. Mike Thompson, 48, of New York City, is flanking a machine gun single-handed. Red-haired Staff Sgt. Tommy Murray of Brooklyn is killing 16 Japs with his rifle and “I don’t know how many with grenades” while his pal from Jersey, Sgt. Jack “Bullhead” McCarthy—son of a policeman—is knocking off 11, and Sgt. Oliver Hobart of Jersey City is gun-butting a Jap in time for Pvt. Ernie Schoeff of Indiana to save Hobart’s life with a well-placed bullet.

All these and a hundred heroes avenge the murderous fire that struck down so early their Colonel and their

Chaplain, but Father Meany hears none of it until days later when stretchers are lined up under the wing of a huge hospital plane as the local Commandant pins a Purple Heart on his mangled breast (later the Silver Star) and Father Meany is going home . . .

Long weeks later in New York City he dials a familiar telephone number in Brooklyn—a number he hasn't used in two and one-half years—and hears a voice . . .

"Guess who," says Father Meany—for the moment just Stephen Meany . . .

His smile fades a little as the voice answers, "Speak again."

"'Tis I, mother!" and then his eyes glisten as the voice speaks on and Stephen Meany murmurs, "I'm all right, mother, how are you?" and then he is talking to his younger sister and laughing and repeating—"Well, don't have hysterics! Take a long breath," and then he is having lunch with two more lovely and ecstatic sisters and one of them is proudly displaying an engagement ring and—Stephen Meany is home.

But all the time Father Meany, the chaplain, is clenching and unclenching his right hand where the nerves and muscles are all too slowly returning to the strength that can climb hand-over-hand from pier to landing barge, for the deepest part of Father Meany's heart lies somewhere in the South Pacific where his boys of the "old Sixty-ninth" are still waiting his return—the "old Sixty-ninth" whose proud battle standard now includes its sixtieth ring—more than any regiment in the world except Great

Britain's Black Watch—the "Fighting Irish" whose flag staff has been lengthened 12 inches by Act of the United States Congress to a measure unequalled by any other regiment in the long history of our country.

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